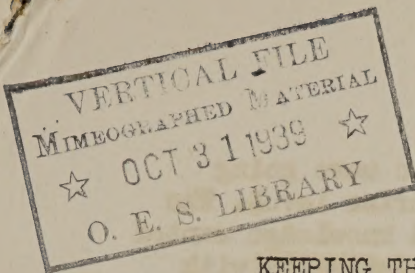


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KEEPING THE LEADERSHIP OF THE LAND-USE PROGRAM IN THE FARM
PEOPLE'S HANDS*

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The very fact that "keeping the leadership of the land-use program in farm people's hands" was considered enough of a problem to warrant a place on this program, indicates to me that some of us are interested not in getting a land-use program devised and planned by the farm people but in getting one accepted by them. Seldom, if ever, is it difficult to get a person to push or sponsor his or her own ideas and program.

I will grant that often it seems difficult to get some people to think and develop ideas or a program of their own but I wonder if that is not because we try to get them to think about something of great interest to us, or something that we think they ought to think about, rather than about something they are really interested in.

In some cases this lack of interest is probably due to the fact that the problem does not affect them personally or directly, but in many instances is it not due to a lack of understanding of the various factors involved. If we really want the farm people to think, to develop their own program, and to assume leadership of it, there is a tremendous job of adult education ahead.

Education has been defined as "the production of changes in human behavior." The truly educated person is not one who simply has his head full of bits of information. Valuable though these bits may be they are simply the first step in the process of education. The truly educated person must, through his own activity, change his behavior. The job ahead of us is not a whirlwind propaganda one of telling farm people a lot of things that indicate our proposals should be accepted. It is rather the slow job of meeting people on their own ground, answering their needs, and starting with their interests. There are no examinations, no prizes. The goals are satisfaction of curiosity, growth of judgment, increase of knowledge, broadening of horizons. If these goals are reached recommendations as to action programs will be forthcoming and well-considered; if they are not reached, recommendations, if obtained at all, will be either perfunctory or ill-considered or both.

Well, you may say, suppose we agree with what you have said. What should we do about it? How can we proceed? I do not know the answer, but if you will pardon a personal reference I will attempt to retrace briefly our thinking along this line.

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When the Extension Service was first organized we were going through a considerable period with a gradually rising price level. The problems were those of production. The information and knowledge wanted by the people was that connected with production. In most cases with such questions you either have the answer or you don't. It was a case of having someone who had acquired the specific information desired go out and give it to the people. In most cases the people had the attitude of wanting to know the answers to the production problems. Under those conditions we were justified in spending a large part of the time in giving out knowledge. Under those conditions you don't need to spend the same proportion of time and energy in developing favorable attitudes. The objectives were clearly in the minds of the people.

When conditions change, as they have changed, especially since 1930, or when you talk about land-use problems, you face a situation where there is a much greater amount of uncertainty. The people do not have their objectives clearly in mind. We don't have the remedies to give them on the same basis as we had remedies for sick chickens. We are not as sure of the results. The problems deal largely with human nature and the reactions of people. It is more necessary first to discuss the situation with the people, give them such facts as we have in answer to their questions, and help them in this way to arrive at their own conclusions and to get their objectives clearly in mind. Until they understand the situation they are not in a position to have definite objectives. Until the majority of the people know what they want as definitely as they did in connection with production problems we won't get very far with any land-use program. In a country such as ours, the majority of the people determine not only what is going to be done but how successful any program is going to be.

The method that has seemed to work the best in this connection has been discussion in not-too-large groups. The particular merits of the discussion method have to do with the opportunities it affords members of the group to state a problem in their own terms and to use their own resources toward a solution, and particularly in the fact that it makes the members of a group think for themselves.

Discussion is inappropriate as a method of fact finding. The techniques of scientific research are far better adapted to that purpose. Discussion is similarly unsuited to conditions in which immediate executive decisions are to be made. The emergency may be too great for discussion. It is desirable as a means of solving problems about which some information is available and on which executive action is still in the future but concerning which active interest and diverse views exist in the community. Under such circumstances, discussion, supplemented with available facts at the appropriate time, provides members of the community with a means of comparing opposing attitudes and beliefs, bringing science and experience into relation, discriminating between facts, opinions, and prejudices and developing for themselves a body of well-tested opinions as a basis for future action.

Although we have been using discussion meetings for the land-use work since it started it is difficult to measure results. The results of any new extension work are hard to measure, and it is even more difficult when you get into the realm of people's attitudes. Often it is impossible until long afterward. One encouraging thing has been that the attendance at these discussion meetings has held up very well. This is an indication that the people are getting something which they wanted. Another encouraging thing is that, sometimes from the first, but usually after we got started, we would get a surprising amount of participation from the members of the group. We reached the stage where they wanted to take part in the meeting themselves. When you can get the people to actually do something themselves you are making progress. Apparently even with quite a lot of subject matter, you will get more retained if the people have discussed it in a meeting with others and have given their opinions. By taking an active part in the discussion they have made such information a part of their own thinking.

It is realized that only a start has been made. The principal object of these meetings is to get discussion and an understanding on the part of the local people of the resources in their community, how they have been and are being handled, and what the possibilities and problems are. A secondary object or byproduct of these discussions will be recommendations of these groups as to assistance that they feel they need or want from various public agencies.

It would seem that a unified program by public agencies based upon the recommendations and requests of the local people to be directly affected would be much more effective and would fit local conditions much better than any program that could be devised by the central agencies alone. It would also seem that such a unified program would prevent much overlapping and working at cross purposes which would arise if each agency pursued its program independently of the others. Last but not least, it would seem that after a discussion and understanding of the problems, many of them could be solved by the local people themselves and others could be solved at less expense than is the case at present. Such a program truly would be in the farm people's hands with the public agencies and personnel in the role of servants rather than masters.

